Foreign Food and Table Arts

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In contrast to image, sound and even dance, food and drink are not part of the repertoire of traditional sensory learning and do not belong to the core themes of the construction of meaning. At best, they are part of the infrastructure of meaning and reason. In order to convince oneself of the trivial role played by food and drink in traditional philosophy, a glance at the comprehensive German philosophical lexicon *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* will suffice: It lists Esse commune and Essentialism, hubris and humor, Mahayana and maieutics, but nothing of 'essen' (food/to eat), 'Hunger' (hunger) or 'Mahl' (meal). Taste is discussed at length, but merely as a springboard for the more recent theories on aesthetics, and hunger is portrayed as a primary need that we share with other anthropoids. The question as to what may be the reason for tradition being so sparse in this respect is rather more difficult to answer. One might be tempted to proceed by simply rectifying this omission by seeking recourse to the ample findings in the sphere of cultural history, as has been done in similar cases. Yet this would leave the question as to the specific place of eating and drinking within empirical knowledge and their significance for thought itself unanswered. A philosophy that explicitly understands itself as one of experience, as phenomenology does, then finds itself shouldered with a task of which neither cultural studies nor cultural philosophy can relieve it.

1. TRADITIONAL FOOD AND DRINK MENUS

Three reasons for the lack of consideration philosophy shows for food and drink immediately become clear. They are in part obstructive and in part prohibitive, meaning that the appropriate thresholds for the discussion of the issue are not actually crossed. However, obstacles often possess an ambiguous character, as they force us to speak of that which has been pushed aside or diminished. Seduction by the phenomena further contributes to surprising finds being made time and again – even where common wisdom would never have expected it.

A first obstacle takes the form of the aspect of *vital necessity*. Food and drink are part of those basic requirements without which a living organism cannot survive. They therefore belong to the realm of *sine qua non* similarly to the physiological mechanisms of the body that allow us to sit, walk and speak – rather than falling within the scope of what is good in itself and worth striving for.[1] The production and preparation of foodstuffs therefore join the ranks of the elementary activities serving to satisfy our other equally elementary needs. In Plato's polis, which emerges from a universal need, as well as from the need for help,[2] the role of the farmer as someone supplying vital food products occupies the most important place among the professions. It is difficult, however, to clearly demarcate the sphere of what is vital, as wishes, including desires for food and drink, surpass the essential by searching out the pleasant rather than the purely wholesome. Man is prone, from the very beginning, to give room to the *superfluous, excessive, luxurious*. And the "healthy city" is therefore infested by outgrowths of a "bloated city". Yet Plato did not glorify simple primitivism. Glaucon, one of Socrates' partners in conversation, called the frugal primeval state a "city of pigs", which merely require feeding.[3] In actual fact, transgressing the confines of pure necessity not only gives rise to a need for cooks, cleaners, nurses and doctors, but without it there would also be no poets, sound artists, dancers or actors – and certainly no philosophers either; for wonder is not particularly preserving of life, but rather tends to interfere with it. Side dishes and desserts[4] then become culinary emblems of a culture not satisfied by essentials alone. In his *Metaphysics* (I, 1–2), Aristotle later made a clear distinction between those arts geared towards human subsistence and knowledge sought for its own sake. Even Marx still linked his order of the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom to this notion.[5] Yet this cultural exaltation does not stop food and drink from belonging to the sphere of the animalistic; it is only humanized by way of rational governance. This holds true to an increased degree for the

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1 | Cf. on this distinction initially *Phaidon* 98b-99b. As is so often the case, discovery and concealment are closely linked here, too.

2 | Cf. the founding history in Book II of *Politeia*: 369b-373d.

3 | This is already a retrospective reading, as just a few lines on, the pig is described as a useless creature, which in contrast to the ox cannot be used as a draft animal and therefore has no place in the primeval city. Kant observed that Rousseau did not intend for people to *return* to the natural state, but instead only to *look back* on it (*Anthropology*, VI, 681) – and similar things can probably be said of Plato.

4 | Side dishes, plural ὄψα: anything eaten together with bread – such as meat or fish – literally translated as 'that which has been cooked' (from the Greek ἕψειν, see also ὀψοποιία: the 'culinary arts'). Dessert, plural τραγήματα: consisting of nuts, almonds, sweet pastries and suchlike.

5 | The questionable nature of this two-step model, in which overabundance follows shortage and which sustains the prevalent notional contrast between the civilized and the primitive, is addressed in the chapter "Zwischen Not und Überfluß. Metaökonomische Überlegungen zum Marxismus", in: *Der Stachel des Fremden* (1990).

guardians in Plato's city, who undergo sensory deprivation from childhood onwards in order to stop them from being encumbered – a state described as similar to that of being weighed down by lead balls (used by anglers to sink their bait) – by a taste for elaborate foods or an inclination towards other luxuries or extravagancies (*Politeia* 519a-b). They are later prescribed a frugal, field-gray diet devoid of both flavorsome seasonings (ἡδύσματα) and culinary artistry, let alone the excesses of intoxication, which would lead to the guardian needing a handler himself (*Politeia* 403c-404e). In contrast to the culinary arts as a practice centered on illusion "aiming at the pleasant and ignoring the best" (*Gorgias* 465a), medicine ensures moderation and that sensible conduct of life is not being eroded by gluttony and alcoholism. Thus in his *Anthropology*, Kant still differentiated between opulence *(luxury)* as excess with taste, and debauchery (luxuries) as excess without taste (VI, 578). The sense of taste is sublimated to aesthetic taste. When it comes to the common "feeding", Kant stuck to basic dietary principles, allowing intentions and habits to make up for a declining appetite (VI, 383–385, trans.).

A second obstacle to the appropriate estimation of food and drink can be found in the central theme of *self-preservation*.[6] A plant withers and an animal starves when deprived of the necessary sustenance. In his writings on psychology, founded in physiology, Aristotle posited the *nutritive capacity* (θρεπτικόν) as the first, fundamental psychic capacity, one that even plants possess in the shape of a vegetative soul (*De anima* II, 3–4).[7] This ability not only ensures nourishment, allowing an individual life form to grow and keep itself alive, but also the creation of kindred beings that sustain the species. Hunger and love therefore together form life's primal urges.[8] Aristotle thus left no doubt about the fact that self-preservation requires the help of others. Parents, and mothers in particular, are the origin of the child's existence, nourishment[9] and education. Yet this remains *extended self-preservation*. "For parents love their children as part of themselves (ὡς ἑαυτῶν τι ὄντα); children love their parents as the source of their being (ὡς ἀπ᾽ ἐκείνων τι ὄντα)", and through their detachment, children become like "another self (οἷον ἕτεροι αὐτοί)" for their parents (*Nic. Ethics* VIII, 12, 2). Children are therefore natural friends, in a way, in contrast to chosen friends, who are also termed "other selves" (cf. ibid., IX, 9).

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[6] The Greek word σωτηρία, deriving from σῶς: 'whole, healthy' (lat. *sanus*), is less reactive than the Latin word *conservatio*, referencing a preservation of that which already exists.

[7] Aristotle uses the term nourishment (τροφή) very widely; he even says of water that it is food for fire (*De Anima* II, 4, 416a27).

[8] Cf. on this W. Theiler's commentary on Aristotle, Über *die Seele* (writings, vol. 13), p. 114. The teleological conception of life, whether as ζωή or as βίος, leaves no space for "naked life".

[9] The Greek verb τρέφειν: originally meaning to make "solid" or "fat", also means "to nourish", "to rear" and "to educate" in the most basic sense.

This cosmically anchored self-preservation loses its communicative backbone in modern times, when individual self-preservation *(conservatio sui)* represents the highest interest for each person (Hobbes, *De homine* 11, 6). In Kant's thoughts on the *Conjectural Beginning of Human History* it is the natural instinct, via smell and taste, that allows us to perceive some things as food while prohibiting us from ingesting others: The "instinct for sustenance through which nature preserves each individual" is complemented by the "instinct for sex, through which it ensures the preservation of each species" (VI, 87, 89, trans.). The assistance others provide becomes a refuge in itself: We need each other.

This leaves us with our third factor, namely *culinary delights*. Here, eating and drinking goes beyond the intake of essential sustenance. A particular social bond is formed between those who come together at the table to eat. Even the citizens of Plato's primal city will "sit down to feast with their children on couches of myrtle and bryony, and they will have wine to drink too, and pray to the gods with garlands on their heads, and enjoy each other's company" (*Politeia* 372b-c, trans. Lee). The simple bucolic feasts in the countryside are surpassed by urban banquets. In Plato's *Symposium*, these reach the unexpected apex of providing an arena for communal philosophizing, with drinking however now marginalized by speeches – if we are to disregard the drunken escapades of Alcibiades ensuing from these events. Summits of this kind stand out from the mundane table manners we practice on a daily basis, which remain in danger of fizzling out into mere habit. Addressing the rarity of true friendship, Aristotle observed mutual intimacy only being achieved after the proverbial salt has been eaten together (*Nic. Ethics* VIII, 4, 1156b 27f.). Conversely, he found it hard to get much out of the social life provided by cult communities and associations, with gatherings of this kind serving pleasure and relaxation purposes only, as in the case of the harvest festival. Gatherings rooted in the moment are subordinate to the life of the political community, as the latter "aims not at present advantage but at what is advantageous for life as a whole" (ibid., VIII, 9,5, 271). It is obviously difficult to view the communal consumption of food and drink as the expression of a general goal. This would indeed require that the abovementioned sacrificial rites carry weight in their own right and mean more than external rites that acquire their ethical cohesion from elsewhere, for example from the agreement as to what is good and bad, just and unjust (see *Statesman* I, 2). Kant in turn traced "sociability" to the realm of the senses. Taste hereby fares better than smell, because when eating and drinking everyone can choose his or her own dishes or bottles without causing annoyance to their fellow diners, as for example the smoker would (*Anthropology*, VI, 452, trans.). That Kant himself was not averse to culinary delights is well known.[10] Yet the conviviality that unfurls around the dinner table is not per se brought about by the meal taken together. Physical satisfaction merely provides the “vehicle” for the social pleasure that combines virtue with wellbeing, without the latter being able to replace to former (VI, 618). Virtues expected at the table are social virtues that lend grace to goodness itself, but they are nevertheless little more than *accessories* (parerga) of virtue (cf. *Met. of Morals*, Doctrine of Virtue, § 48). Or in other words, table manners cannot be generalized; they may be cultivated but never moralized.

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[10] | I am referring to a study by Iris Därmann: "Kants Kritik der Tischgesellschaft und sein Konzept der Hospitalität", in: ibid.: 2009, pp. 98–114.

2. INFERIORITY OF FOOD AND DRINK

Our initial breakdown of the problem cannot obscure the fact that there are a multitude of nuances between the thinking of Plato and Aristotle, between Descartes, Hobbes and Kant, and it shows that in reading classical texts we face secondary themes that run counter to the main ideas time and again. Yet without doubt there is a theme that amounts to disregard for food and drink. In the sense of Aristotle, eating and drinking has to do with *man as living being*, in Kantian terms with *man’s animal nature*,[11] in a Cartesian sense even with *man’s mechanical nature*. Some examples follow to illustrate this.

Gods do not eat and drink. Shedding light on his mytho-theological predecessors’ blunders, Aristotle revealed as utterly incomprehensible the presumption that all the creatures that had never tasted nectar and ambrosia were mortal. “If the gods take nectar and ambrosia for the sake of pleasure, their doing so does not explain their being; and if the gods do so for the sake of their very being, how could beings who need nourishment be eternal?” (*Met.* III, 4, 1000a 15–18). Eating and drinking have no place in metaphysics, in the realm of eternal wisdom and final goals.

With Descartes is it not God, but the thinking self that rejects food and drink. In his answers to Gassendi, the philosopher is adamant that nourishing oneself must be exclusively attributed to the body, just like feeling and walking – and not to the soul as the place of thought (AT VII, 351). He saw the sentence “I eat and drink” as nonsensical in the strictest sense, except when used in everyday language, in which soul and body are comingled without inwardly belonging together. *The cogito does not eat and drink*, or in more modern terms: *Consciousness (the brain) does not eat and drink*.

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[11] | Cf. Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, A 112. Man is more beastly than any creature when he indulges in purely physical pleasures. In book IX of the *Politeia* Plato vividly describes the life of those who wallow in “feastings”: “with eyes ever bent upon the earth and heads bowed down over their tables they feast like cattle grazing and copulating, ever greedy for more of these delights …” (586 a-b, trans. Shorey, online available at: http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0168%3Abook%3D9%3Asection%3D586b [accessed on Jan. 10, 2017]).

In Kant's philosophy, Descartes' onto-theological rift morphs into a double human existence. *I do not eat and drink as a rational being, I do so as a creature of the senses.* The way in which we eat and drink therefore becomes subject to the law of rationality. The cultivation of food and drink itself constitutes a moral demand that leads to man's animalistic nature conforming to humanity. Yet eating and drinking remains something secondary and lowly as compared to conduct informed by moral precepts. The classification of taste and smell as being among the base senses, which affect us rather than teaching us something, is in keeping with this view. As a whole, the senses belong to "perception by the organs stemming from the many external gateways with which nature has provided the animal in order to differentiate between objects" (*Anthropology*, VI, 447, trans.).

The hierarchy of the emotive faculties and the corresponding senses entails that the ennoblement of food and drink gains a mythological, symbolic or merely metaphorical complexion.[12] With the crickets chirping in the mid-day heat, Socrates told his students the story of the people who were so enraptured by the songs of the muses that they forgot to eat and drink up to the point of being on the verge of dying – in return they were transformed into the species of the cicada, a kind that needs no nourishment from the moment it is born and may promptly burst into song needing neither food (ἄσιτον) nor drink (ἄποτον) (*Phaedrus* 259b-c). But also the mythical concept of the food and drink of the gods returns in philosophy in the shape of the divine nourishment of reason, a blessing the soul receives having repeatedly seen the truth (*Phaedrus* 247d). Augustinian theology turned this into the divine nourishment the believer is granted in the *frui Deo*, in rejoicing in God.[13] The biblical "hunger and thirst for righteousness" can then only be metaphorically interpreted as a transferal of the vehemence of physical needs onto a mental or spiritual desire.[14] Within the bounds of pure reason, Kant saw the Christian sacrificial meal as little more than a moral memento. Communion, which may take place "through the formality of a common partaking at the same table", then constitutes a mere means towards vitalizing the moral disposition of brotherly love, and this despite its being carried out in order to keep the memory of the act of foundation alive (*Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, IV, 876). The cosmo-theological reflections of Hölderlin's verses now seem far removed: "Bread is fruit of the earth, yet it is blessed by the sunlight, / And from the thundering god issues the joy of the wine." Even everyday expressions such as "hungry for love", "thirsty for knowledge", "biting mockery" or "swallowing one's anger" take on a merely metaphorical character when eating and drinking is relegated to the realm of crude physicality. In this sense food and drink would merely serve as an outward vehicle helping us to understand an inner life that is difficult to access. The sexual coloring of alimentary expressions such as "loving someone to pieces" (to be devoured), which Freud calls attention to,[15] could then be dismissed as nothing more than the confusion of basic instinctual spheres.

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[12] | I here comprehend the metaphor in the sense of a transfer of meaning that makes mental aspects accessible by way of the senses, and invisible ones by way of what is visible. The possibility of a vivid metaphor amounting to more than a 'mere metaphor' in the sense suggested by Paul Ricœur is not precluded by this.

[13] | The enjoyment of and pleasure in God returns in manifold figures of speech in Pietism and in the sentimental era. Cf. on this and on a Kantian criticism of this the article "Genuß" by Gerhard Biller and Reinhard Meyer in: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 3 (1974).

[14] | Cf. in contrast to this the greater proximity to the physical in Pascal: "We do not weary of eating and sleeping every day, for hunger and sleepiness recur. Without that we should weary of them. So, without the hunger for spiritual things, we weary of them. Hunger after righteousness, the eighth beautitude." (*Pensées*, 264, trans. W. F. Trotter)

3. FOOD AND DRINK INCARNATE

The disregard for food and drink changes when we see the consumption of it as a bodily and inter-bodily occurrence that produces its own orders and which is overdetermined in the same way the contents of dreams, physical symptoms and traumatic events are. Only eating and drinking that is in itself more than mere eating and drinking becomes part of the order of things, of the formation of the self and the origin of the self from the other.

A phenomenology of eating and drinking, of which we have so far established only an outline, will know better than to equate eating and drinking with processes of nourishment intake, digestion and excretion. It will further abstain from reducing food and drink to aliments that can be assessed according to their nutritional value, and from confusing them with foodstuffs bought and sold on the market. Calories are measured values just like weight and temperature; they belong to the mathematical matrix of alimentary experience and can only be experienced indirectly. In terms of a phenomenology of food and drink, the question arises as to how physiological, economical, socio-cultural and religious factors interact in lived experience. Nietzsche's provocative recourse to physiology may serve as a stimulus, but does not spare us from working through the phenomena.

The complexity of alimentary experience can be seen even in the classical texts taken as our starting point. Plato for example makes it clear from the very beginning that eating and drinking are not processes that simply conform to causal laws, but that instead the soul of the hungry or thirsty person has "an *impulse* to what he desires" and in each case this is an impulse towards a "particular kind" of nourishment, such as for example a hot or cold drink (*Politeia* 437b-438b). With each of our desires we look

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15 | Cf. "Aus der Geschichte einer infantilen Neurose" (GW XII, 141); phenomena of disturbance, such as anorexia or an addiction to sweets, are here connected to the early phase of a cannibalistic or oral sexual organization. More on this in Därmann: 2005, pp. 227–234.

for something that we ourselves do not possess as a quality.[16] Furthermore, one aspect of eating and drinking is that our sense of taste understands – as rudimentary as this knowledge may be – how to differentiate between palatable and unpalatable. Even Aristotle described the striving *for something* going hand in hand with the perception *of something*, with the perception of food, beginning with touch, playing an irreplaceable role in our quest for nourishment (*De anima* II, 3, 414b 1–10). Current physiology here speaks more precisely of "taste buds" scattered inside the mouth and throat area that respond to basic qualities such as bitter and sweet, sour and salty. Plato further emphasized that a primordial memory is inherent in desire. The person experiencing thirst desires the opposite of what he is experiencing in that moment, namely, a "fulfillment" in the future, to end the current "depletion". But how is the soul to know of the "fulfillment" if not via memory, by retaining an earlier state of fullness?[17] After all, the fact that our desire for food and drink is driven by our imagination is one of the self-evident truths assumed by an anthropology of the senses. If this was not the case, there would be no common phantasies surrounding food and drink like that of the Land of Cockaigne. Kleist provided a lively demonstration of the extent to which perception and appetites hereby interlock. His "Brandy Guzzler" hears in the ringing of the Berlin church bells a cascade of commands ordering him to drink, beginning with the solemn "Bitter orange! Bitter orange! Bitter orange!" before shifting to the pressing "Caraway! Caraway! Caraway!" and finally to the breathless rush of "Anisette! Anisette! Anisette!", which sounds somewhat akin to a death knell.

We see, then, how the multifaceted character of food and drink is shaped by intentionality, perception, memory, imagination and desire. But is that enough? What happens to the rest, that which actually constitutes the act of consuming food and drink rather than merely anticipating or circumscribing it? Eating and drinking are evidently not confined to intentional action aimed at a specific object or to actions following specific rules. The blades of phenomenological or analytical philosophy go blunt when directly applied to alimentary phenomena. If satiety is considered nothing but the satisfaction of alimentary intentions or the adherence to alimentary rules accompanied by the corresponding physical and mental processes, then eating and drinking dissolve into *disjecta membra* – that which we want, that which we must do and that which happens without our involvement. As in similar cases, we would then be faced with a cognitive or cultural superstructure housing a set of social rules and founded on a natural basis. The formation of hierarchies, which we have encountered time and again, would endure. Neither would they disappear even if we were to invert the conditions according the motto: "First comes a full stomach, then comes ethics".

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[16] **16** | It is remarkable that the simple formula of "being intent on something" (εἶναι τινός, 438a-b), which contains the seed for the later theory of intention, is developed gastro-nomically from food and drink.

[17] **17** | Cf. *Philebus* 35a-c. In this later dialog we find traces of the theory of anamnesis, which from the start was constituted in terms of affect and eroticism rather than in a purely cognitive sense (cf. *Phaedo* 73d).

Hierarchizing and dualistic tendencies may be suspended if we are to assume both a corporeal eating and drinking as well as a physical manifestation of hunger, such as becomes grimly personified in Knut Hamsun's famous novel – here reaching its most extreme incarnation in the "happy folly of hunger" (2009, p. 125, trans.). In Husserl's words, the body functions as a "point of interconnection", where intellect and nature, or culture and nature, but also the self and the other are in a constant process of merging. In her extensive and provocative study combining ethnology, psychoanalysis and phenomenology, Iris Därmann also sees the body as playing a special role – namely in the form of an *incorporation*, operating on the threshold between the self and the other and giving the oral aspect a special significance.[18] The following experiment, which has the above-mentioned work to thank for manifold stimuli, is much narrower in scope. It assumes an *otherness of one's own body*, which finds a *pars pro toto* of sorts in foreign foods. The individual themes of otherness are suited to the correction of the traditional bottlenecks we have encountered, as well as to the reinforcement of contrary themes, of which there is no shortage in the great tradition either.

4. THEMES OF OTHERNESS

To begin with, let us consider the aspect of vital necessity. Simply citing elementary needs and the means necessary for sustaining life proves questionable when we reflect on the mechanisms of taste and pleasure. *Taste* contains an excess that directly breaks the cycle of appetite and satiation, of emptiness and fulfillment as well as that of memory and effect. The taste of food and drink exhausts itself in its nutritional value just as little as does love in reproduction. If Aristotle generally views lust as something that *joins* our striving for a goal,[19] then this likely holds true for the taste of food and drink, too. In relation to eros, Aristotle occasionally spoke in a Platonic manner of a *surplus* or *excess* (ὑπερβολή).[20] When it comes to food and drink we repeatedly find reference made to ingredients that have more to do with opulence and superabundance than with necessity. More specific is the previously mentioned aspect of *flavor*. The Greek term ἥδυσμα literally refers to that which makes food palatable, of which only a small dose is needed (cf. *Nik. Ethics* IX, 10, 1170b 29). It also appears in the Aristotelian theory of nutrition, which forms the basis of his psychophysiology. In hunger, desire is here said to be geared towards the dry and warm, in thirst towards the wet and cold.[21] The contribution provided to the perception of nourishment by the senses is said to be incidental, as nourishment itself has neither color, sound, nor smell. There is one exception to this, namely, taste – or, to be more precise: the nourishing fluid (gr. χυμός, deriving from χεῖν: "pouring"), perceived via the nutritive faculty of touch. It is noted here regarding the flavor observed via the sensation of taste: It is, as it were, a kind of seasoning of the nourishing substances mentioned (*De anima* II, 3, 414b 13 f.). Salt also belongs to the sphere of flavoring, and in Latin the word *sal* also means wit. In an exclamation such as "You are the salt of the earth" it takes on a missionary dimension, while we encounter it in a more mundane sense in the previously cited salt-eating as a mark of friendship. But why salt, in particular? Salt, which does not fill us up, but which, as well as providing us with mineral substances, lends our food a savory, delicious flavor, has more to do with the event of *eating* together than with *what is being eaten*, that which each person is consuming and digesting. The differentiation between the tale and what is being told here finds its culinary echo. In the same way as speaking always surpasses the words that are spoken, we find a sensual excess manifested in taste that can never be entirely transposed into nutritional terms, despite contributing to our diet. Each and every dish and each and every drink contain traces of nectar and ambrosia, in much the same way as every meal reflects the luster of a feast, even if our everyday eating and drinking is much sparser than the fancy dinners described by Proust in the opulent tones of the Flemish Masters. When it comes to drinking, we must consider the bouquet of wine, something that has to be tasted rather than merely drunk. Culinary and drinking cultures draw on this type of surplus, which is as old as mankind. The multitude of cultures allows for considerable variations, expressed for example in African societies using pot ash instead of salt or Inuit peoples making do with drinking sea water

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[18] | Cf. Därmann: 2005, in particular the discussion of Marcel Mauss and Sigmund Freud in chapters 2 and 3.

[19] | Cf. *Nic. Ethics* X, 4, 1174b 31–33: "Pleasure completes the activity not as the corresponding permanent state does, by its immanence, but as an end which supervenes as the bloom of youth does on those in the flower of their age." However, surplus itself is here still conceived in a teleological sense as an epiteleology of sorts.

[20] | Cf. *Nic. Ethics* VIII, 7, 1158a 12; this section looks at the love of an individual. In a *Problemata Physica* originating from the Aristotelian school and concerned with sexual intercourse, a distinction is made between necessary desires such as for food and drink and the desire for sex, the latter being said to stem from

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an excess (of fluids); and one was said not to be ashamed of the former, but certainly of the latter (online available at: http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.8.viii.html [accessed on Jan. 10, 2017]). As this section and many others show, something ambiguous clings to hyperbole, let alone excess, reprehensible as a failure to achieve virtuous moderation (*Nic. Ethics* II) or as having too many friends (IX, 10, 1170b 23).

[21] | This theory of the elements has also left its marks on the cosmology of the sexes (cf. the discourse on sexual intercourse mentioned previously). The connection between the spheres of nourishment and sex, which can only be clarified in genetic terms with great difficulty, is indicated by such physiological speculations.

and consuming algae. Spices belong to an odd section of the culinary arts. As André Leroi-Gourhan remarked in relation to this sphere, "The combination of thyme with salt and nutmeg cannot be translated into movement, not even into words."[22] What is crucial, however, is that this formation of taste is part of the physical foundations of our culture. This is true even for so-called "primitive" culture and arts. "A compilation of fragrances, a gastronomic meal may well be described as an art work", wherever these may appear.[23] The degeneration of culinary culture, as indicated by the increasing consumption of fast food, is a sign of cultural demise – or, in fact, of poverty. Those dying of hunger or thirst lose their sense of taste. Conversely, what is seen as a culture's crude beginnings may well become part of that culture's projections if it lacks confidence and hopes to escape this by modeling itself after the very antithesis of its origins.

Enjoyment is related to taste. Enjoying relates to something exceeding an immediate "tucking in" and even exceeding purposeful pursuit; it requires a certain delay within which the food may exercise its forces of attraction and repulsion. Fasting rites, which we find in all cultures, should not primarily be viewed as a scorning of food, but rather as an enhancing of the latter by making use of a special kind of *alimentary epoché*. The memory of desire, which Plato brought into play, opens up perspectives into the future as well as into the past. Yet savoring something involves neither remembrance nor expectation, but rather taking pleasure in what arises in the moment. Pleasurable savoring is not an intentional activity carried out in order to affect anything past, future or present. Related to savoring is *sustaining-oneself-by* ..., or *subsisting on* ..., which surpasses all imagination and production, all meaning and desire.[24] That which we nourish ourselves with becomes part of us. Yet Kant's approach was too simplistic when he defined the higher senses as being characterized by "superficial" perception and the lower senses by "most intimate ingestion" (*Anthropology*, VI, 451, trans.) and when he located enjoyment within a subjective interiority along with feeling. The common subjectivization of that which resists objectivization – and thereby also a general verifiability – disregards the distance from whence that object came, which now touches us inwardly. The bodily seat of feelings, which shall be discussed in the next chapter, finds its completion in the bodily seat of enjoyment or pleasure. What we savor remains 'other' to us as something we draw *on*, without consuming it in its entirety or possessing it. Common categories in the theory of goods fall short if they presuppose something that nourishes us to be an entity we acquire by producing, consuming, conserving and capitalizing on it. Even the interpretation of desire we find in Plato in relation to hunger and thirst, namely as a shift between depletion and fulfillment (*Philebus* 35a), only manages to uncover a minute aspect of the matter. Enjoyment does not involve something flowing in and out like in a leaky barrel that is forever filled and emptied (*Gorgias* 493b). Rather, the person enjoying and the source of enjoyment undergo a change in the pleasurable act. Aristotle encountered this very problem in considering the question as to whether a creature is nourished by like or unlike. He decided that the answer lay somewhere in the middle. By digesting food, unlike is turned into like through a process of equalization, or assimilation (*De anima* II, 3). Yet metamorphosis, or to put it in modern words, metabolism, means more than just filling. At the same time, the question arises as to whether assimilation does not always contain moments of an *otherness that cannot be assimilated*, as contradictory aspects are incorporated, and something is made edible that may not be readily eaten. In this sense all foods are prepared, not just cooked comestibles but raw ones, too. The distinction between raw and cooked, on which Claude Lévi-Strauss based his theory of food culture, does not refer to a divide, but rather a threshold value that varies in culinary terms depending on a combination of natural and cultural circumstances. And so every dish we consume contains a "small piece of nature", an inedible piece of nature that belies its origins, be this a few drops of saltwater on the shell of an oyster or a gnarly piece of vine shoot complete with yellowed leaf on a bunch of grapes (Proust, *Recherche*, II, p. 416). Yet what we ingest to nourish ourselves resembles the air we breathe in and out, which we may hold, but cannot store at our convenience. We cannot stock up on enjoyment. Entelechy, which Aristotle brings into play whenever something living is concerned, reaches its limits here, as do our modern conceptions of the construction of meaning and compliance with rules. Culinary normality is achieved through normalization; it is not an instant given, and like all normality it remains contestable.

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[22] | Cf. *Hand und Wort* (1984), p. 364; the paleontologist author examines gustatory perception, olfactory sense, gastronomy and cuisine from a cultural-theoretical perspective.

[23] | Cf. Franz Boas, "Primitive Kunst" (engl. 1927), cited after Prussat/Till: 2001, p. 86; among others, the ethnologist author refers to Alois Riegl's formal aesthetics.

[24] | Cf. on this the extraordinary passages Emmanuel Levinas devotes to enjoyment in chapter II of *Totalität und Unendlichkeit*, which also look at the enjoyment of food.

A phenomenology of food and drink must further incorporate the theme of *giving*. It is common knowledge that considerable efforts were required to make this topic acceptable for philosophical debate.[25] What this means in our context is that eating and drinking must be regarded – in a similar way to speaking and acting – as an occurrence that *ab ovo* has to do with the other and with others. Yet this by itself will not suffice. The otherness of an offering we obtain from another place is lost when giving is integrated into a reciprocal relationship of give and take and channeled into the paths of an exchange of equivalents. We find producers in the Platonic proto-polis that not only produce food but also employ tradespeople to offer their sur-

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25 | The accomplishments of authors such as Mauss, Levinas, Lacan, Derrida and their successors must be called to mind here, including the most recent analysis by Marcel Hénaff: *Der Preis der Wahrheit* (2009). I have myself attempted to provide a way of approaching this topic, which does have an – albeit underestimated – backstory in the ancient world, from the angle of giving an answer in my *Antwortregister*.

pluses for sale on the markets. The division of labor in the production and circulation of goods implies that all those involved will communicate to each other what they have cultivated (*Politeia* 371b), by using money as a symbolic medium of exchange. It is only the day laborers, hackneys, wage workers or however else one might translate the Greek word μισθωτός who give something of themselves, namely, the use of their strength and energy (371e). A community thus forms in which justice consists in everyone doing their part and receiving in exchange the equivalent in goods corresponding to how much they have given, and giving as much as they have received. Giving (διδόναι) is then turned into par-giving (μεταδιδόναι), taking (λαμβάνειν) into partaking (μεταλαμβάνειν), all of which is founded on a multi-layered system. In idealized terms food and drink are therefore shared food and shared drink. Peace is threatened, however, by each individual's insatiable wanting-more (πλεονεξία). A munificent nature that gives without taking only appears in the backdrop against which the myth is set. In the naïve era of Cronus, which Plato portrays in the *Statesman*, agriculture did not yet exist and humans gathered fruits that "sprang up of their own accord for men"[26] from the earth and the creatures did not eat one another (271e-272a). Ovid described the Golden Age in similar terms: Humans were "content with given food, and none compelling [it to grow]", whilst "rivers flowed milk and nectar, and the trees, the very oak trees, then gave honey of themselves". The age of Zeus brought an end to this childlike dream: "The food which had formerly offered itself freely had failed them", so humans needed to make use of the "gifts of the gods", such as fire and the arts, in order to fend for themselves (*Statesman* 274c-d).

The question remains, however, whether this turn from helplessness to self-help, from being preserved by another to self-preservation, does not belong to the myths of civilization itself. This installation as myth would consist in the recasting of a personal and collective *case history* that always takes place *too early* as nothing more than an *ancient history*, which merely begins *earlier on* and can be left behind incrementally. This is of course a reframing; for what characterizes the gift – for better or worse – is the aspect of anticipating obligingness that can never be entirely caught up with. This holds true for the early life of the infant, the *nourrisson*, who not only subsists on something but at the same time on someone, his mother – who in turn gives (or does not give) a part of herself with the food. This primal gift falls into line with a succession of other gifts.[27] Yet beyond it there is a gesture of giving that runs through an entire life and that aims at something beyond what is given itself. Under the right circumstances I can provide myself with gifts, but I cannot receive the gesture of giving – which I accept in the same way I would accept a promise – from myself. If this were any different, a gift could be acknowledged like a payment, and thanks would be no more than an empty phrase to lubricate the social gearing mechanisms. The excess of giving is also reflected in table manners, such as for example in Japan, where it is customary for diners to pour each other's drinks. This does however require paying special attention to each other and in this way one is present with one's table companions as though skillfully playing a musical composition together. In this sense a meal that someone eats would always be partially someone else's, just as according to Michail Bachtin every word we speak is "half someone else's word", answering to the other's words and carrying them on – even if we were talking with ourselves.

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[26] **26** | Literally 'gave up', 'handed upwards' (gr. ἀναδιδόναι). This vertical giving belongs to a different dimension than horizontal giving and taking. The fact that in mythical language the earth has a gender connotation as mother earth is in keeping with this.

[27] **27** | Iris Därmann's paper must be mentioned here again for not only having contributed valuable insights into Freud's analysis on early childhood sexual development, but even more radical observations on Laplanche's general theory on the libidinous character of food.

The last theme of otherness to be addressed here concerns the meal, in particular its property of being a *banquet*, a meal served for guests. Of course, this theme opens up utterly vast perspectives, so a few aperçus must suffice here. A meal is not a simple succession or cluster of individual acts, but rather an event taking place here and now as well as in repetition. In this sense we have *meal times* such as, for example, the classical Roman succession of *ieientaculum*, *prandium* and *cena*, and *places of eating and drinking* such as dining rooms or halls and taverns. Further, we have courses, utensils for eating and drinking, recipes, instructions for eating and drinking and much more besides. A meal always references others, just as self-talk is held with others and with oneself as another. It takes place in a shared world.

Beyond all this, a certain unfamiliarity remains inherent in every group of diners. This begins with *table etiquette* in the broader sense. Like all other arrangements and orders, these rules were invented or established by agents that for the most part remain anonymous – as is generally the case with clothing, housing and language. The individual eats and drinks *how one* eats and drinks, and this *How*, as well as the *One*, may take on more or less diffuse or homogenous patterns, as is generally the case. A *third aspect* is always at play that makes something like companionship at a table possible. This third element may in special cases be represented by a third person, such as, for example, in the formality of the ancient symposiarch, the *magister bibendi*, who tasted the wine, distributed and mixed it, or in the shape of a Georgian tamada, a traditional table master (now also admissible in female form), who ensures, by prompting the guests to deliver dinner speeches and reciting toasts, that the dinner party does not break apart, the social interaction does not become too vapid and the celebration does not turn into a drinking binge.

Yet the order of the third party is also countered by the unfamiliarity of the other. A table etiquette that is the way it has become over time but that could also have turned out differently cannot help but appear exclusive and selective. This not only means that not everyone is included, but that no-one is entirely included in their singularity. Foreignness or otherness begins at the table, as every child who has been taught to behave in a curious fashion while eating knows. Like all systems, table etiquette ranges between the extremes of compulsion and arbitrariness; it is more or less open. But beyond that there is the space for absentees. The custom found in many places of reserving a seat for the deceased makes this void perceptible. Yet guests who could possibly come are also absent. No dinner company is complete; there are always surplus diners, even if one is to stick to the rule of thumb, as Kant did, that the number of diners should not fall below the number of graces or exceed the number of the nine muses (*Anthropology*, VI, 617). *Hospitality*, which imbues every meal with the features of a banquet and every dish with the features of foreign food, then does not constitute a special case, but an enduring vexation that cannot be entirely solved through the *right to hospitality*, either. Kant recalled the Arab, "whom the foreigner, had he managed to obtain from the former a refreshment (a drink of water) in his tent, could also trust with his safety", as well as "the Russian empress receiving *salt* and *bread* from the deputies meeting her from Moscow, and knowing that having consumed these foods she would be safe from ambush as she was then secured by the right to hospitality" (VI, 619). On what is this security founded? And what about those dying of hunger and thirst, who have long since been more than mere marginal figures? If we are to seriously consider just how close otherness and hostility are and how quickly the gift of food can turn into poison and receiving into taking away, then we will be careful not to dismiss table manners as mere customs.